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Section I (Amendments to the Claims)

Please amend claims 1, 3-8, 10, 13-15, 18, 21, 46, 48 and 49 as set out in the following listing of the claims of the application.

1. (Currently amended) A nucleic acid construct encoding a fusion protein, wherein the construct comprises a coding sequence for a protein of interest and a coding sequence for a protease prodomain protein, wherein the fusion protein comprises the protein of interest operatively linked to the protease prodomain protein and wherein the protease prodomain protein has binding with high affinity to a protease or a variant thereof.
2. (Previously Presented) The nucleic acid construct according to claim 1, wherein the protease is subtilisin or a variant thereof.
3. (Currently amended) The nucleic acid construct according to claim 2, wherein the protease prodomain protein further comprises one or more amino acid substitutions that increase binding affinity for subtilisin or a variant thereof, as compared to the protease prodomain protein with no substitutions.
4. (Currently amended) The nucleic acid construct according to claim 1, wherein the protease prodomain protein comprises a variant of SEQ ID NO: 1, wherein the variant comprises a substitution at one or more of positions P1-P4 wherein the substitution comprises any of F or Y substituted for P4, any amino acid residue substituted for R3, A or S substituted for P2 and M, F, Y, H, or L substituted for P1.
5. (Currently amended) The nucleic acid construct according to claim 2, wherein the protease prodomain protein is a prodomain of subtilisin.
6. (Currently amended) The nucleic acid construct according to claim 3, wherein the protease prodomain protein comprises substitutions of amino acid residues F or Y for P4, any amino acid residue for P3, A or S for P2 and M, F, Y, H, or L for P1 at the C-terminal end.
7. (Currently amended) A fusion protein comprising a target protein operatively linked to a protease prodomain protein, wherein the protease prodomain protein is modified to exhibit an increased affinity for subtilisin or a variant thereof, as compared to the unmodified protease prodomain protein.